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DEPT FOR EAP/ANP
BANGKOK FOR OFDA

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SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION: SEVERE FLOODING IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

¶1. This is an action request. Please see paragraph 10.

¶2. SUMMARY: Ambassador Leslie Rowe declares the situation in Solomon Islands (SI) a disaster which qualifies for emergency assistance funding per the Ambassador's Authority. The SI government has declared a national disaster due to severe flooding caused by heavy rains, strong winds, and rough seas caused by a low pressure system south of Renbel in early February. It is estimated that over 20,000 people in three provinces have been affected. Ten casualties are confirmed, and ten people are missing. Communication and transportation to many of the more remote areas remain challenges. The SI government sent a formal request for Embassy assistance via diplomatic note on February 5. Current donor assistance does not meet the relief needs of the affected areas. END SUMMARY

AFFECTED AREAS

¶3. Heavy flooding affected the central island provinces of Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Makira. It is estimated that at least 20,000 people have been affected, but communication and transportation to many of the areas remain challenges. Homes and gardens were destroyed, and property was devastated in all areas. Initial needs in all areas included tarpaulins, water containers, bottled water, medication, building supplies, and food.

¶4. Northwest Guadalcanal is the worst affected area with flooding, mudslides, and damage to existing dwellings in villages. The mudslides appear to be adjacent to areas that have been logged in the past. Malaita has 33 wards, and only partial reporting is available from six so far. The reports state that 80 homes and 259 gardens were destroyed, schools damaged, and businesses destroyed. No reports have been provided from Makira at this time.

¶5. Food remains a priority need for all areas. A recent Red Cross assessment states that in 75% of the communities assessed, gardens were totally destroyed. The assessment also looked at availability of store items in each community. It was found that in 50% of cases stores had no food left, 35% had a maximum of 3 days supply, and 15% said they had enough supplies for 1 week only. All stores said that they would not have the resources or funds to replace stocks once they were used.

¶6. The recent assessment by UNICEF, Save the Children, the Social Welfare Division, and the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children covered an estimated population of 4,436 (2,840 children under 18 years and 1,596 adults). It stated that 45% of the affected communities surveyed have access to medical facilities and 53% have been visited by a health team in the past week. People are concerned about the spread of disease, although no outbreaks have been reported. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are major concerns. Only 32% reported access to uncontaminated water, and 21% reported sufficient supplies. All communities are reported to have inadequate supplies of food. Thirty-three percent of communities reported damage or destruction of their schools. Large numbers of children have been relocated to Honiara and are

staying with relatives.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

¶17. The SI government has declared this a national disaster managed through the National Disaster Council (NDC). The NDC is issuing daily situation reports and holding partner briefings to keep the media and donor community informed. The Ministry of Health is also holding daily coordination meetings. A formal request for assistance was received on February 5 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

DONOR RESPONSE

¶18. Australia (AUSAID) has pledged USD\$69,450 to assist the populations affected by the disaster. The Australian Defence Cooperation Program is also providing fuel for a patrol boat to transport emergency aid and assessment teams. Australia is providing additional assistance through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) Participating Police Force, which is working with Solomon Island counterparts to provide assistance. This includes the distribution of humanitarian assistance, medical evacuations, and the evacuations of teachers and students. New Zealand (NZAID) has pledged USD\$76,400 in assistance. The UK has pledged USD\$19,750 for assessors and family kits. Japan (JICA) has pledged USD\$100,000 for purification units, jerry cans, and water tanks. Taiwan pledged USD\$28,000 for assistance and food supplies. A French Navy frigate, in SI on a goodwill visit, assisted with delivery of relief supplies. Post has consulted with SI officials and other major donors and established there is still significant need for relief supplies and emergency commodities.

¶19. Temporary repair work has already commenced on reconnecting flood affected rural areas to urban centers for access to markets and social services. This repair work of roads and bridges is being conducted by the Solomon Islands Road Improvement Project (SIRIP) team, co-financed by the Asian Development Bank, and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand. The SI Red Cross, UNICEF, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, and Caritas are currently conducting assessments and distributing relief supplies in the affected provinces.

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

¶10. Based on the situation, Ambassador Rowe confirms a disaster of significant magnitude has occurred in Solomon Islands to warrant USG assistance. Post requests \$50,000 under the Ambassador's Authority. These funds will be awarded to the SI Red Cross for the distribution of emergency commodities. Post requests that OFDA/Washington approve the request and provide funds as soon as possible.

ROWE